

## old and new by lollercakes

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**Summary:**

Perched on the edge of a sadistically uncomfortable plastic chair, her lawyer sitting across from her, Joyce can only seem to ask herself: how did they let it get this far?

## old and new

She couldn't believe that she was doing this again, the thick envelope full of papers grasped tightly between her fingers. Her cheeks burned as the lawyer handed her a pen.

"I've noted on each page where you need to sign. Because it's an amicable divorce, the division of assets can be found on page 15. There wasn't much, as you're aware, but Mr. Hopper did relinquish the house and all assets within it," her lawyer droned on, leaning back in his chair and pressing his palms together.

Her mouth dried up as she looked down at the desk, averting her eyes in shame. She didn't understand how they got here. Four years ago they'd been fighting monsters, their bond stronger than any relationship they'd forged when they were younger. Now they were fighting almost constantly, always coming back to the same argument and resolving nothing. A month ago Hopper had moved back to his trailer and he'd lashed out with filing papers, furious and bitter.

And now she was here, faced with their rash decision and aching with a hurt that she couldn't shake. She'd been a fool. They'd both been fools. Stubborn, angry fools.

"Mrs Hopper - I mean, Byers... Sorry - are you keeping his name or -"

"Stop," Joyce interjects with a whisper, shaking her head as the tears prick at the corners of her eyes. Her throat hurts with the words, each syllable scraping from her.

"I'm sorry - I feel like maybe I haven't been briefed fully because of the rush of these proceedings. Do you need more time to look over the paperwork?" The man sits forward and for the first time lets a hint of sympathy colour his tone.

"Just stop, please." She groans and looks up, curling her hands along the edge of the papers. With a quick jerk she tears them apart, sobbing heavily as the ripped pieces flutter to the floor. "I don't want this anymore."

Her lawyer stares at her, his mouth hanging open as he looks at her. "Joyce - that's hundreds of dollars of billable hours that you just destroyed. Are you sure - "

"Stop! I asked you to stop," she hisses and gets to her feet, hands threading through her wild hair. Joyce spins on her heel and stomps towards the door, her oversized jacket pulled from the coat hanger as she disappears into the hallway. She doesn't stop until she's in the parking lot of the strip mall, her chest heaving as she crawls into her tiny car and screams her throat raw.

Time slips by and soon the sun is setting, her body exhausted as she looks out at the emptying parking lot. She can't go home. Not looking like this. The kids would ask questions. El would probably start crying again. She'd have to explain what was going on, why Hopper still wasn't coming home. Did she even have an answer for them when she didn't understand it herself? He wasn't coming home because of her. Because she was too stubborn and he was too pig-headed.

God, what was she doing?

Eventually the chill in the air started to creep around her, fingers going numb as the windows fogged. She knew she couldn't stay here all night and that she'd have to head home at some point but her heart wasn't in it. The failures were too raw, too fresh, and she couldn't bear the weight of them.

So instead she turned over the car starter and let the little engine rumble to a start, pulling out into traffic and driving aimlessly until darkness was fully engulfing her and hiding her from the world. She drove for hours to nowhere in particular, looping around the small town and backtracking back and forth along the interstate. It was the car that finally gave up, sputtering to a stop on the side of the road and rousing a slew of cursing from her lips as she realized she'd run out of gas.

It was late. Too late to flag down another car for help without ending up riding with some stranger who would leer at her and probably kill her. She couldn't help but think she'd really done it this time - driven herself to god-knows-where only to strand herself away from her kids

and the home she'd worked for years to build.

Slapping her hands angrily against the steering wheel, Joyce groaned and rested her head against her hands. Everything had fallen apart and it was her fault. She'd always been the reason they'd failed. During high school she'd broken it off, terrified of how close he was getting to her heart. She'd stopped writing when he'd finally shipped off to war, chickening out on the intensity that his letters were taking on. When he'd come back, broken and drowning after he'd lost his daughter, she'd hidden behind her boys and done her best to stay out of his way as he bedded half the town.

Now that they'd finally found their way back, had finally said their vows and promised each other the world, she was scared and fighting tooth and nail to pull it all apart again. A glutton for punishment. A wretch who couldn't just be happy.

Lost in her thoughts, Joyce ignored the lights of the vehicle coming up on her tail until they were blinding in the mirror, the fog of the early dew rising between the two cars. She wished she'd gotten out to walk, anything to avoid whoever was in that car that was getting out to come check on her. She was trapped and the knuckles on the window made her jump as she rolled the window down a crack.

“Joyce?” Hopper’s familiar voice greeted her, the low tone growling out and slinking down her spine. It was unfair that his voice always had that effect on her, turning her to putty in his hands.

“What do you want?” She snapped in return. Her defenses were raised by the way he made her feel and the weakness she felt after everything that had happened that day. She couldn’t stand up to him, not anymore.

“Why are you out here? Shouldn’t you be at home with the kids?” His words are steady and she’s envious of him, of the way he can continue to be so confident when everything was teetering on the edge.

“My car stopped.” It’s all she can offer and his responding grunt makes her think for a second that he’s just going to leave her here, still angry with how they’d left things.

But he doesn't. His hand drops to the handle and he pulls the door open without asking, the rush of cold air slapping her in the face. "Come on, I'll drive you home."

She stays frozen in her seat, eyes averted as his feet shuffle in the gravel. When his hand eventually moves and wraps around her upper arm she shrinks away as though burned, hissing at the contact. There's a moment then, hot and vibrant, that she feels like she's going to explode. Like maybe this is where she self-combusts and finally escapes this misery. But she doesn't and instead he drops to a crouch at her side and exhales, his breath moving the hair along her cheek.

"Joy," he sighs, patient, endlessly patient.

"I went to sign the papers today," she counters angrily, finally looking over at him. He nearly stumbles back, catching himself on the door as he stands back up and twists away from her. His hands come to rest on his hips, his shadow casting across her and engulfing her.

"Oh," is all he manages, staring out at the empty road. There's a pause that drags on for centuries, a ribbon held between them taunt and strained. When he does eventually turn back to face her his expression is neutral, his voice calm. "I'll drop you off on my way to the station."

"I don't want to go anywhere with you," she whispers even though it pains her to say it. She doesn't mean it. She wants to be with him always but she can't say it aloud. Can't admit it even to herself.

"Yeah, well, maybe I'm not worried about just you," he snaps back angrily. His posture changes, tightens, and he pulls his hat from his head with a jerk that she recognizes all too well. "Get out of the car, Joyce."

"No." One word electrifies the air around them and Hopper growls, swearing and walking away before turning back to look at her with the headlights at his back. He looks bigger with the backlit glow and shadows masking his face, towering over her and making her heart jump into her throat.

“Do you plan to just stay out here all night and freeze? ‘Cause I can leave you to that but that’s going to be a hard fucking conversation to have with Jonathan,” Hopper barks from near his truck knowing full well that Jonathan could do nothing from his apartment in New York. It was his standard lash, one that on most other occasions would make her concede, but this time just made her step out of the car and angrily dig her feet in.

“I’d be better off waiting for some stranger to drive down this goddamn road and give me a lift than to get in that truck with you,” she shoots back. Her throat stings with the words, aching after a day spent indulging her misery.

“Yeah, and then they’ll murder you and I’ll still have to clean up your mess! Sounds perfect. Just fucking amazing. You know - “

“It’d be cheaper than a divorce!” She screams back at him, tipping off of the deep end without warning. There’d been a plan in her head that she’d avoid this fight, that maybe she’d sign the papers and they would go an entire lifetime without ever facing this, but all bets were off now that the words were past her lips.

“I thought that’s what you wanted. You said you’d rather divorce me than have this baby with me and since clearly the latter is happening - “ He pauses, his hands motioning towards her before tangling in his hair fitfully. “Just please get in the car, Joyce. Please.” His bravado falters and the wind blows out of her sails, dejection filling her as she slams her car door closed.

A truce forms between them as she climbs into the cab of his truck, struggling up the step and huffing when she finally settles in the front seat beside him. Neither of them speak as he puts the truck into gear, pulling out onto the road and leaving her car in the dust. He misses the first exit to town and then the next before she realizes where they’re heading, a grumble escaping from her as she looks over at him.

“You said you were going to take me home,” she seethes, crossing her arms over her chest and tucking closer to the door.

“Yeah well maybe we need to fucking hash this out once and for all,”

he snaps and jerks the car around a corner and down towards his trailer.

“I don’t want to - “

“We need to. For fuck’s sake Joyce, we need to talk this out,” Hopper pleads as he rolls the truck to a stop. They sit in the cab for another ten minutes, silence stretching out until Hopper opens his door and comes around to open hers. She ignores his outstretched hand and steps out of the truck, pulling her shirt down to cover her growing belly. “Let’s go inside. Heat’s on.”

The trailer is desolate when she steps through the door, all the signs of life that used to be here gone and nothing but a cot and a few blankets strewn about the room. She notices, shooting him a wide-eyed look before turning her attention back to her feet.

“You can, uh, take the cot. I’ll stand,” he starts, gathering up a few old takeout containers and dumping them in the trash. She steps carefully to the cot and looks up at him, lips sealed as he putters around the space. When finally he turns back towards her the anger from earlier is nowhere to be found. Instead his brow is furrowed and she can’t ignore the way his beard seems to have become unkept.

“What are we doing here, Hopper?” Joyce asks lowly, watching him like a cornered animal.

“We have to talk about this. We can’t keep fighting,” he pauses and rubs his face, glancing over at her before looking back to his feet. “You’re having our baby, Joyce.” It tumbles out of him, weak and broken, and it makes her heart hammer in her chest.

She’d been trying to avoid thinking about it for weeks now. The morning sickness, the mood swings, the way her body just felt off. All of it confirming what she refused to admit. When finally Hopper had dragged her to the doctor’s they’d both walked out stunned, silent, as they drove back home. The fights had come soon after, foundation shaking screaming matches that ranged from minor conflicts to all out death matches. Neither of them had been prepared for this. They’d taken precautions, had thought they were being careful, but there they were, proof of the failures of technology.

“I know I am. Trust me, I know,” she whispers harshly. Her shoulders are at her ears as she watches him out of the corner of her eye, desperate to read his body language for any hint of what’s coming next. “I can’t have another baby. I’m too old. My boys are grown.”

“Our boys,” he corrects and tries not to flinch as she huffs in response. “They’re mine too now, you know. They were part of the bargain.”

“Yeah, I know.” She scuffs her boot against the floor as she admits it. He was right. Their little blended family of mismatched toys.

“Do you want to get rid of – “

“Hopper,” she interjects softly, his unbearable suggestion making her queasy.

“I realized I never asked what you wanted in all this. What you wanted to do about it. I just assumed... It was stupid of me,” he pauses, glancing over at her. She looks away like she’s been burned, hiding the way his words have etched into her. “If you’re keeping it, I mean, regardless of if you were, I’m not going anywhere.”

His words have the opposite effect on her and she gets to her feet, stomping away down the hall before turning back to face him angrily. “Why do you feel you have to say that? Why did you serve me with those papers?”

The truth of it becomes apparent and it slaps across him, his body reacting at her words. She’d thought they were beyond his affirmations, that it didn’t need to be said that he would stick around, but apparently he still thought that he needed to say it. That a part of him thought he needed to reassure her that he wouldn’t leave. It was that doubt that made her insides clench and her heart twist.

“I was being an asshole. I would never – I don’t – Joyce, it’s you. It’s always been you and I’ve been fucking it up so badly that I didn’t know how to stop...”

“How can I trust you not to leave after this?” She asks carefully, watching his every move with an intensity that burns.

“I don’t know. All I can tell you is that I won’t. That I love you and that I’m never going anywhere,” Hopper offers and steps towards her, gaze focused on her and only her. “We’ve always burned too hot and cold, Joyce. But I took it too far. I want you and I want this baby, even if I’m only now admitting it.”

His words wash over her like calamine, soothing her and giving her back a small piece of hope. She was still angry, still frustrated, but his willingness to bear it all helped. Meeting him halfway across the room she doesn’t hesitate to reach up and rest a hand on his chest, her eyes searching his.

“I ripped up the papers,” she admits as his hands lift to cup her chin.

“I should never have filed them. I was so wrapped up in being an ass that I didn’t even realize that I wouldn’t have signed them. I’ve waited my whole life for you, you think I’d give you up that easily?” He whispers and leans his forehead down to hers, their noses bumping.

“I blame my part of the hormones,” she chuckles before lifting up to kiss him softly. He returns the embrace and holds her against his chest, breathing in the scent of her after too long away. Together they rock on the spot, holding tightly and closing the gap that has existed between them.

“We’re going to have a baby,” Hopper sighs as a cold rain starts tapping on the tin roof overhead. Joyce murmurs into his chest and wraps her arms around his neck, following his movements that were steering them back towards his cot.

The back of his legs bump up against the metal and he sinks down onto it, his hands bracketing her hips and holding her to him.

“If I’m already knocked up...” She starts, glancing away as her cheeks burn with her forwardness.

“We don’t – I mean, I just want to be close to you. I’ve missed you so much,” he replies and presses a kiss to her belly. Her hands rest on the back of his head, keeping him near as his hands explore.

“I missed you too. I want this.” Her confidence soars as he looks up at her with awe, her smile growing with every second that passes. Taking the lead she moves to straddle him, her small frame tucking against his chest as she pulls him in for a deep kiss.

Reciprocating, he lets his hands tangle in her hair as he pulls her closer, desperation taking over as he opens to let her in. She works her hands down to his sides and pulls at his shirt, yanking it up and over his head. Her hands discard it and she lets her fingers thread through his chest hair, tugging gently as he hisses into her mouth.

She feeds off of his sounds, her lips grazing over his chin and to his ear where she pulls at the lobe with her teeth. His resulting grunt stokes the fire in her and she sighs as his hands slide up her skin and over her bra, her own hands pulling at the edges of her shirt to take it off.

“You’re beautiful,” he whispers against her skin as she clings to him, their chests pressed together as they struggle for breath. She’s desperate to be closer, to feel all of him, but she can’t figure out his utility belt or the buttons on his trousers and she grumbles at the struggle.

“Help me,” she whines, yanking at his belt and sitting back on his knees. He shakes his head and takes the opportunity to release the clasp on her jeans that’s held together with a rubber band. His eyes shine as he looks down at her belly, curving more prominently into the band of her underwear as his hand slides over the skin.

“I love you,” he confesses and kisses her fiercely, his hand dipping below the elastic so his fingers can work their way into her. She jerks at the invasion, grappling against his back and moaning at the contact. “I love you,” he repeats and continues his ministrations until she’s pressing into him, panting and nipping at his shoulder.

“Hop,” she keens, chasing the heat of it and fighting to climb further. He feels her getting close and stops, flipping them until she’s on her back and he’s able to pull her pants off with a swift movement. His own pants join hers after a moment and he kneels down on the cot between her legs, his hands bracketing her face.

“It’s always been you.” His expression softens as she watches him, her smile reaching her eyes.

“I love you,” Joyce whispers and pulls him down to her so that she can wrap her legs around his hips. A free hand works between them and slides him inside of her, their closeness finally complete as she hisses at the feel of him.

They work together after that, slow and measured as they move and shift on the tiny bedframe. It doesn’t take long for Joyce to return to the precipice she’d been at moments before, his hands and his body helping drag her to the top as every kiss, every breath feels like coming home. When finally she tips over, Hopper lets his movements falter as the feel of her coming apart overwhelms him. It’s only a few more moments of jerking hips, soft grunts and clinging hands before he’s coming too, emptying himself into her with thrusts that drive him deeper.

He stays inside of her until he can’t anymore, eventually pulling apart and dragging the blanket over them. Somewhere in the mess of haphazard clothes his radio buzzes, Callahan’s voice calling him to respond.

“I should get that,” he grumbles, doing the opposite and tucking her closer.

“I’m sure he’ll understand when you explain what an asshole you’ve been,” she laughs in reply, burrowing into his chest. His hand turns her face up to his, expression honest.

“I’ve been such an idiot. I’m so sorry – “

“It takes two,” she shrugs and leans up to kiss him. The radio buzzes again and their bubble pops, the distance between them having been finally closed.

#### **Author's Note:**

I forgot to post this here, sorry if you've already seen it! If not, hopefully you enjoy :)